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Nonprofit changes name but not game

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Saturday is the inaugural Community Assistance Center Day, during which participating shops and restaurants in Sandy Springs and Dunwoody will donate a portion of proceeds to help low-income residents.

The two-city event will help salute 25 years of providing basic needs and promoting self-reliance by a nonprofit organized in 1987 as the Community Action Center, Executive Director Tamara Carrera said at its annual meeting Tuesday at Dunwoody United Methodist Church to about 75 attendees, including Sandy Springs Mayor Eva Galambos and Dunwoody Post 4 City Councilman Terry Nall.

"We're going to be celebrating the whole year," Carrera said about 33,000 clients, 350 individual donors, 300 volunteers, 28 supporting congregations, 11 employees and a 20-member board of directors, who will begin with a new name but familiar acronym.

"CAC began as the Community Action Center," outgoing board president Cheryl Sykes said during a strategic plan update. "During the planning process over the past year, we realized a better name for us would be Community Assistance Center."

The nonprofit, which operates on an annual budget of \$1.6 million, will retain its goals.

"Our mission is that we bring together the Sandy Springs and Dunwoody communities to provide compassionate assistance to neighbors in need," Sykes said.

Carrera, recent winner of the 2012 Sandy Springs Humanitarian Award, said the nonprofit uses a "holistic" approach including, but not limited to, financial support.

"We're not just giving a check and a Band-Aid. Clients get a plan of what to do with their situation and how to solve it," she said.

A client since 2008, Sandy Springs resident Nicole Fitzgerald said the nonprofit's results-oriented strategy helped her avoid eviction, keep utilities connected and put food on the table.

"I was a little reluctant at first to seek their services for fear of being ridiculed," she said. "However, when my neighbor began to share with me how friendly and caring the staff was, my mind was put at ease."

Fitzgerald also received accounting training and a 2002 Honda Odyssey minivan so she and her children Bria, 18, Brandon, 16, Bryant, 13, and Brooklyn, 7, did not have to rely on public transportation.

"It opens up so many doors," Fitzgerald said.

One door is at the nonprofit, through which she now walks as a donor, not a consumer.

"This year, through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, I'm able to give back by being a volunteer," Fitzgerald said.

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